



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

November 13, 2012

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From:  Christine Daniel, City Manager

Submitted by: William Rogers, Deputy City Manager

Subject: Managing Citywide Environmental and Sustainability Programs, Policies and Projects

INTRODUCTION

This report responds to a City Council referral requesting the City Manager evaluate the costs and benefits of creating a new Department of the Environment (DOE) through the consolidation of certain environmentally pertinent functions within existing City departments. Staff obtained information from cities requested in the Council referral (San Francisco, CA; Rochester, NY; Alexandria, VA) as well as other cities that have created Departments of the Environment (Seattle, WA; Chicago, IL; Honolulu, HI; and Washington, D.C.) in an effort to understand different approaches to incorporating environmental sustainability practices in municipal operations. In addition, staff convened internal stakeholder departments including Public Works, Parks, Recreation and Waterfront, Information Technology, Health, Housing and Community Services, and Planning (Office of Energy and Sustainable Development) to review data from other cities and discuss the costs and benefits of creating a new Department of the Environment within the City of Berkeley.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECT

Some cities have created Departments of the Environment (DOE) in an effort to coordinate and prioritize environmental sustainability practices within municipal operations. At Council's request, staff reviewed DOEs in several cities and discovered two principal approaches: 1) Departments of the Environment with a focus on citywide policy development and service coordination and; 2) Departments of the Environment that combine policy functions with direct services and operations.

**Policy Development and Service Coordination**

Most cities with this approach have created a relatively small and efficient environmental sustainability unit whose purpose is to recommend policies, monitor all City departments for alignment and compliance with Council adopted environmental policies, and to provide a broad range of support for the implementation of green practices citywide. This approach seeks to ensure that sustainability efforts are embedded in all city functions. A DOE in a city with this approach coordinates services among internal municipal departments, local businesses and city residents. It is rooted in the idea of coordinated goals, collaborative efforts and shared organizational

accountability rather than responsibility for a city's sustainability practices residing in a single department.

Seattle's mission articulates this approach, which reads in part, "Because of the City's long history of environmental planning and implementation, environmental goals are embedded in much of the City's current work across most departments." While Seattle operates its own water and power systems (including Seattle Public Utilities for water, sewer, and solid waste and Seattle City Light), the primary foci of their DOE include environmental sustainability coordination; environmental sustainability innovation and research; climate change action planning, policy and measurement; and green building and resource conservation for City operations and commercial entities.

San Francisco's DOE also utilizes this approach and provides some sustainability services, including commercial energy efficiency programs and green business certification. The majority of their work, however, is in developing environmental policies that are implemented by other city departments. San Francisco convenes expert staff from city departments in ad-hoc task forces and working groups to address emerging issues such as bio-fuel permits and municipal green buildings. They also support a "green jobs" training program, produce educational materials for schools, and provide incentives and technical assistance to commercial and residential building owners who are working to improve their energy efficiency.

### **Combining Policy, Direct Service and Operations**

This approach generally consists of combining environmental policy with direct services and operations typically provided by Public Works or other city departments. The inclusion or exclusion of specific operational functions varies from city to city.

In Rochester, NY, for example, the DOE includes traditional public works functions; climate change and energy-efficiency policies and implementation; toxics management; and urban forestry. Rochester also manages its own water supply and waste water collection and treatment.

Alexandria, VA's, DOE provides building permits; develops climate change strategies; improves energy efficiency in public buildings; administers energy-related grants; manages transit services; monitors air quality; provides hazardous waste cleanup and participates in Brownfield development. The department also conducts public education around conservation and enforces the noise ordinance.

Both Rochester and Alexandria's DOE include services traditionally provided by Public Works Departments including watershed programs, sidewalk programs, street repair, refuse and recycling, traffic mitigation, parking and row permits, bike and pedestrian planning, sanitary sewer programs, engineering services, private sewer lateral programs, and street repair.

Similar to Rochester and Alexandria, the City of Chicago initially took the approach of developing a separate Department of the Environment but dissolved it last fall, citing both budget reasons and their interest in integrating environmental efforts into all existing program delivery.

### **Berkeley's Approach**

The City of Berkeley currently has an Office of Energy and Sustainable Development (OESD) that serves a policy and service coordination function across all City Departments. The goal of Berkeley's OESD is to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions and to work with Berkeley residents, business and City government to create a healthy urban environment. This office creates policies, convenes inter-departmental groups, develops initiatives, and works to align the practices of all city departments with Council adopted environmental policies and goals. It works with internal and external stakeholders to implement Berkeley's Climate Action Plan and reflects the belief that sustainability is a citywide responsibility.

### **Alternatives**

Based on staff review of other cities, there are three primary options: 1) Create a new Department of the Environment; 2) Preserve and maintain what exists; or 3) modify and augment Berkeley's current practices.

While creating a new DOE could result in some sustainability improvements to specific operational functions, staff anticipates there would be a shift from a citywide effort that includes residents, city departments, and businesses to a narrower focus on internal and operational functions. In addition, preliminary staff review anticipates potentially significant financial costs and service impacts associated with creating a new department and reorganizing existing departmental operations. Bringing together services that are disparate in their function can lead to management challenges (e.g. overseeing services as different as economic development and solid waste pick up) and a significant reorganization such as this would likely create immediate operational and customer service challenges.

The City could also choose to preserve and maintain what currently exists without modification. While this would result in operating under current city practices which are functioning well, it does not take advantage of opportunities for improvement.

Finally, the city could modify and augment current strategies and practices. Staff research on other cities and the ensuing discussions resulted in suggestions for improvement. Staff proposes modifications that will further the City's environmental and sustainability goals while retaining the value of embedding environmental services within all departments. This will encourage ownership of the city's sustainability efforts while supporting the goal of environmental leadership in all areas and at all levels of the City.

Staff suggests administratively implementing the following to augment the City's existing environmental and sustainability efforts:

- 1) **Establish a standing Multi-Department Environmental Working Group with the goal of coordinating and accelerating the implementation of the city's sustainability efforts.** The team would be convened quarterly by the City Manager's Office with high-level participation from the Office of Energy & Sustainable Development. The working group would be charged with setting performance goals, tracking progress, advising staff on carrying out priorities, increasing accountability for reducing energy and resource consumption within city operations, developing strategies for removing barriers to sustainable community practices, identifying and coordinating grant opportunities, and consistently communicating progress to internal and external stakeholders. The group would include department and division leaders to ensure project goals can be met with existing staff resources and to assist program staff in prioritizing projects.
- 2) **Add an "Environmental Impact" section to Council reports.** This section would be similar to the "Fiscal Impact" section, and would describe and quantify environmental impacts. The goal is to alter the organizational culture, requiring departments to consider and articulate the environmental impacts of their actions in every Council report.
- 3) **Articulate environmental goals in the annual Citywide Work Plan presented to Council at the beginning of the fiscal year.** Departments would articulate their environmental goals, progress toward those goals and outcomes in their annual work plan.
- 4) **Include training on environmental sustainability in the city's core training program for staff.** This would include the city's environmental priorities and a framework for considering the environmental impact of decisions and actions.

#### BACKGROUND

At its April 3 meeting, the City Council directed the City Manager to consider the creation of a Department of the Environment by combining divisions, functions and services from across the City. Currently, Berkeley's sustainability programs and goals are embedded in almost every City department.

#### POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Staff will include a report on the Environmental Working Group's progress when the annual report on implementation of the Climate Action Plan is next presented to Council.

#### CONTACT PERSON

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Attachment:

1. Links to Additional Information

**Links to Additional Information**

1: Article from Sustainable Chicago

<http://www.sustainable-chicago.com/2011/10/14/chicago-disbands-department-on-the-environment/>

2: About SF Environment – A Department of the City and County of San Francisco

<http://sfenvironment.org/about>

